

means adapted for displaying each of the plurality of symbol groups on a selected portion of the array area; and

testing means adapted for testing position of symbol relative to the pay area.

20. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the display further comprises a staging area, and further comprising:

means adapted for displaying each of the plurality of symbol groups in the staging area; and

means adapted for moving each of the plurality of symbol groups from the staging area to the array area.

21. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19 further comprising means adapted for paying predetermined amount of winnings on any predetermined winning combination appearing in the pay area as determined by the testing means.

22. (New) The gaming machine of claim 21 further comprising means adapted for defining at least one portion of the display area as a bonus area, and wherein the testing means includes means adapted for testing position of symbols relative to the bonus area.

23. (New) The gaming machine of claim 22 wherein the means adapted to pay winnings include means adapted for paying winnings on any predetermined winning combination appearing in the bonus area as determined by the testing means.

24. (New) The gaming machine of claim 23 wherein the winnings for any predetermined winning combination appearing in the bonus area includes at least one of a predetermined monetary amount added to the winnings paid on any combination appearing in the pay area, multiplying the winnings paid on any combination appearing in the pay area, and awarding a free game wherein the gaming machine operates without the placement of a wager.

25. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19 wherein at least one symbol group includes at least three visible symbols arranged non-linearly.

26. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19 wherein at least one symbol group includes at least one wildcard symbol and wherein the testing means includes means adapted for testing positions of wildcard symbols relative to the pay area.

27. (New) The gaming machine of claim 26 wherein the means adapted for paying winnings on any predetermined wildcard appearing in the pay area as determined by the testing means.

28. (New) A method for operating a gaming machine comprising the steps of:
displaying an array area having at least two dimensions;
defining at least one sub-portion of the array area as a pay area;
generating, from a pre-selected set of visible symbols, a plurality of visible symbol groups, each visible symbol group being formed from a set of at least two contiguously disposed visible symbols;

displaying each of the plurality of symbol groups on a selected portion of the array area; and
testing position of symbol relative to the pay area.

29. (New) The method of claim 28, further comprising the steps of:
displaying a staging area,
displaying each of the plurality of symbol groups in the staging area; and
moving each of the plurality of symbol groups from the staging area to the array area.

30. (New) The method of claim 28 further comprising the step of paying predetermined amount of winnings on any predetermined winning combination appearing in the pay area as determined by the testing means.

31. (New) The method of claim 30 further comprising step of defining at least one portion of the display area as a bonus area, and wherein the testing means includes means adapted for testing position of symbols relative to the bonus area.

32. (New) The method of claim 31 further comprising the step of paying winnings on any predetermined winning combination appearing in the bonus area as determined by the testing means.

33. (New) The method of claim 32 wherein the winnings for any predetermined winning combination appearing in the bonus area includes at least one of a predetermined monetary amount added to the winnings paid on any combination appearing in the pay area, multiplying the winnings paid on any combination appearing in the pay area, and awarding a free game wherein the gaming machine operates without the placement of a wager.

34. (New) The method of claim 28 wherein at least one symbol group includes at least three visible symbols arranged non-linearly.

35. (New) The method of claim 28 wherein at least one symbol group includes at least one wildcard symbol and further comprises the step of testing positions of wildcard symbols relative to the pay area.

36. (New) The method of claim 35 further comprising the step of paying winnings on any predetermined wildcard appearing in the pay area as determined by the testing means.

REMARKS

The subject amendment has canceled the previously filed claims 1-18, and substituted therefore new claims 19-36. The newly provided claims include limitations that are not found in the art of record. It is respectfully submitted that all remaining claims are patentably distinct over the art of record, and in condition for allowance. An early allowance is respectfully urged.